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ABSTRACT

The national survey of teacher certification directors was designed to assess the status of state legislation mandating services for children from birth to age 5 and to assess the progress of state education agencies in developing certification standards for teachers of the preschool handicapped. Among findings were that only 16% of all states require that an unrestricted birth to 5 year old handicapped population be served; that preschool handicapped services are provided by an array of agencies, ranging from rehablitation services, social services, and human services to the Association for Retarded Citizens and local day care centers; 68% of respondents report the center based model is used most often; and state standards and regulations for certifying teachers of preschool handicapped children are established in 35% of the states. Several strategies should be employed to affect state policy decisions: active parent organizations need to be involved and nurtured, the general public must be informed about early education for the handicapped, education personnel must begin interacting with other child care professionals, and advocates must organize a legislative task force. Tables with statistiical data are included. (SW)

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Preschool Handicapped Education--
A National Survey of Services and Personnel Requirements

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Abstract

Educational services for preschool handicapped children have recently been placed in jeopardy by the threatened decrease in federal monetary support. This study was a national survey of state legislation related to mandated services for preschool handicapped children, which is viewed as a necessary guarantee if educational services for young handicapped children are to continue despite federal deregulation and cutbacks. States were also surveyed regarding their teacher certification requirements for this population. Results indicate that although progress has been made since the implementation of P.L. 94-142, less than 50% of the states currently mandate some type of preschool handicapped services, while only 35% of all states have established preschool handicapped teacher certification standards. The results are discussed in terms of the major issues which may be influencing state education agency policies and implications for the future.

Preschool Handicapped Education

The importance of early education for handicapped children has been discussed extensively in the professional literature (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Horowitz & Paden, 1974; Smith & Bissell, 1970), and recent longitudinal studies have confirmed its enduring effect (Lazar, Hubbell, Murray, Rosche, & Royce, 1977; Fredericks, Moore, Baldwin, n.d.; Palmer, 1977; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1980). The empirical evidence which has been generated from this population in terms of the efficacy of early education has impacted federal policy-making and legislation. With the enactment of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, states were provided the impetus to serve preschool handicapped children (Bricker, Seibert, Scott, in press; McGovern, Draper, & Vacca, 1978, cited in Lessen & Rose, 1980). This impetus was not in the form of a legal mandate to serve all preschool handicapped children from birth to five, however, but consisted primarily of the allocation of incentive monies to state and local education agencies through the State Implementation Grants and the Preschool Incentive Grants. While seed monies are an important step toward the provision of services to preschool handicapped children, it does not guarantee the right to early education for all children in this age group. The onus for guaranteeing these services, if there is to be a litigated guarantee, rests at the state level.

Recent congressional action has made it evident that federal monies for providing services to preschool handicapped children may no longer be a major source of assistance. State governments have now had six years to use the federal monies as leverage for enacting state legislation that would indeed guarantee services to the birth-to-five year old population. It is not currently known what subsets of the preschool handicapped population, in terms of age groups and handicapping conditions, are being served by the states.

Gilkerson, Osteen, and Trohanis (1981) recently reported that five states (Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, and South Dakota) have mandatory legislation for the birth to five age group, and that nine additional states (Alaska, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin) have mandatory legislation for the three to five year old group. However, it was not reported how this information was obtained, and data was not presented on those states with mandated legislation for the provision of services to limited subgroups of the preschool handicapped population. It is not clear, then, which states and to what extent the states have succeeded in legislating preschool handicapped services.

In addition, while state legislation can mandate the provision of services, legislation alone does not control the quality of the services young children will receive. As an initial step toward quality control, state agencies of education have begun to enact teacher certification standards and guidelines recognizing the unique training needs for teachers of young handicapped children. As Hirshoren and Umansky (1977) reported, these unique needs have been discussed in the professional literature. Hirshoren and Umansky conducted a survey of state teacher certification requirements for this population one year after the enactment of P.L. 94-142. They reported that 24% (N=12) of the states (including the District of Columbia) had teacher certification programs in early childhood special education, and an additional 10% (N=5) of the states were in the process of developing such guidelines. The remaining 67% (N=34) of the states indicated at the time of the study that they had no teacher certification requirements related to this category.

The purpose of the present study was two-fold: (a) to assess the current status of state preschool handicapped legislation mandating services to handicapped children from birth to five years of age by providing a detailed breakdown of

which subgroups of this population each state has mandated to receive services, if any; and (b) to assess the progress of state education agencies in developing preschool handicapped certification standards since the last reported survey five years ago. Additional information will be presented on the type of service setting reported most often by the states as the predominant setting used to provide the services; and the availability of teacher-training programs in preschool handicapped education.

Method

Subjects and Instrumentation

A survey of the directors of teacher certification in the fifty states plus the District of Columbia was conducted during January through April, 1981. A one-page questionnaire, requiring a yes/no response option, was designed to elicit information pertaining to state legislation for subgroups of the preschool handicapped population, as well as the type of teacher certification required by the state. Percentage estimates were requested for information pertaining to the type of service setting used in the state, while frequency data was requested on the number of teacher-training programs available.

Procedure

A three-step procedure for collecting the data was used. First, an initial mailing was conducted which included a cover letter and the questionnaire, requesting the respondents to mail the questionnaire back within the specified time period. The cover letter was uniquely designed to provide reinforcement contingencies for the respondents to encourage participation in the survey. Figure 1 is a sample of the reinforcement contingencies included in the cover letter sent to the respondents.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Secondly, a follow-up letter and questionnaire was sent one week after the initial contact. The reinforcement contingencies were restated and the timeline extended to encourage respondents to take advantage of the reinforcer.

Thirdly, states failing to respond to the written request were then contacted by telephone and the questionnaire was orally read to them by a research assistant and the response recorded in the appropriate space on the form.

Results

Twenty-seven states (53%) responded to the initial contact. An additional 13 states (25%) completed the questionnaire upon receiving the follow-up letter. The last 11 states (22%) were then contacted by telephone to complete the information on all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. It is noteworthy that many of the respondents indicated that additional individuals within the agency were designated to respond, if necessary, to accurately complete the questionnaire.

The state by state response to the survey is presented in Table 1. The results address two major issues: (a) the extent to which preschool handicapped educational services have been mandated by the states, and (b) the state certification requirements for preschool handicapped teachers.

Insert Table 1 about here

Preschool Handicapped Educational Services

State legislative mandates for preschool handicapped. The respondents were asked to indicate whether or not their state had a legislative mandate to serve two subgroups of the preschool handicapped population; birth to three (0-3) and three to five (3-5) year olds. Sixteen percent (N=8) of the respondents reported that

their state requires that all handicapped children between the ages of birth to five receive educational services.

Within the birth to three year old range, eight percent (N=4) of the states have mandated educational services for limited subgroups of the target population. Delaware and Texas serve only deaf/blind infants. Oklahoma requires that the infant must be at least 50% below normal development, while Illinois indicated that they serve some categories of handicapping conditions in this age range, but not all.

An additional 24% (N=12) of the states have mandated that all handicapped children within the three to five year old subgroup must be provided educational services. In 14% (N=7) of the states, limited subgroups of the population are served. Oklahoma and Minnesota serve only four and five year old preschool handicapped. South Carolina serves only four year old deaf children and all handicapped five year olds, while the remaining five states serve only the five year old group. (This would reflect the federal mandate that requires states to serve handicapped children if normal children are receiving educational services. Hence, states mandating services for kindergarteners must also serve handicapped five year olds).

To summarize the data on state legislative mandates for the provision of preschool handicapped educational services, only 16% (N=8) of all states require that an unrestricted birth to five year old handicapped population be served, while 53% (N=27) of all states legislate for at least some subset of the total preschool handicapped population. Table 2 presents a summary of this data.

Insert Table 2 about here

Preschool handicapped service availability. Respondents were additionally requested to indicate whether or not there are preschool handicapped services in operation in their state, even though all children in the state may not have access to them. Despite the low percentage of states legislating educational services to the birth to three year old preschool handicapped population, 83% (N=42) of the states indicated that there were preschool handicapped services available, albeit serving a limited number in most cases. An even higher percentage of states, 96% (N=49), reported that preschool handicapped services were in operation and available to at least some subset of the 3 to 5 year old preschool handicapped population. It is noteworthy that only two states did not respond affirmatively to the question of service availability. Table 3 presents a summary of this data.

Insert Table 3 about here

Information on the total number and percentage of preschool handicapped children within each subset who are currently receiving educational services is not available on a national scale. Many states indicated that preschool handicapped services are provided by an array of agencies, ranging from rehabilitation services, social services, and human resources to the Association of Retarded Citizens and local day care centers. This makes current national estimates difficult, if not impossible.

Preschool handicapped service setting types. Fifty-nine percent (N=30) of the respondents indicated the type of service setting used most often in their state to serve the preschool handicapped. Service settings were divided into: (a) home-based; (b) center-based; and (c) a combination home and center-

based model.

Ranking the models as to the one most often reported as the predominant model used by the state, the results indicated that of those states reporting this information, 68% (N=19) indicated that the center-based model was used most often. Twenty-one percent (N=6) reported that the home-based model was the predominant service setting mode, while only 10% (N=3) indicated a combination home and center-based model was most often used. Two states (Nebraska and North Dakota) indicated that several model options were used equally as often. Table 4 presents this data.

Insert Table 4 here

Preschool Handicapped Personnel

State teacher certification requirements. State standards and regulations for certifying teachers of preschool handicapped children are established in 35% (N=18) of the states. (State standards were reviewed to verify that preschool handicapped was a separate and recognized category of its own within the overall state certification guidelines.) Twenty-four percent (N=12) of the states indicated that they are currently in the process of developing such standards. This results in forty-one percent (N=21) of the states reporting no specific standards governing teachers of young handicapped children. Since the last reported survey (Hirshoren and Umansky, 1977), there has been a net gain of ten states establishing such guidelines, while an additional nine states have begun the process. Table 5 presents a summary of this data.

Insert Table 5 about here

Discussion

This study was a survey of state directors of teacher certification in the fifty states plus the District of Columbia. Survey respondents were requested to submit information related to the legislative status of education for preschool handicapped children within their respective states, as well as identify state educational agency progress in the establishment of guidelines and certification requirements for personnel intervening with this population. The results indicate that some progress has been made at the state level to insure education for young handicapped children. However, an analysis of state legislation reveals that few states require that all handicapped children between the ages of birth and five years of age be served. The vast majority of states have identified only limited subgroups of this population in their legislation, with the three to five year old group being the most likely to be served (39% of the states, plus the District of Columbia, mandate services for all handicapped children between the ages of three to five). One can see that this represents less than half of the states, and hence, a significant step away from full service to all preschool handicapped children.

It is heartening to find preschool handicapped services available in a much larger percentage of the states (83%); but this, of course, cannot be construed to indicate that all preschool handicapped children in these states are receiving services. Identification of where these services are in each state is hindered by the multiple agency administration of programs. It would seem safe to speculate that many existing programs are supported by funds outside the local educational district, and are, therefore, in jeopardy of termination due to future loss of funds.

One can only speculate as to the quality of programs currently being administered to young handicapped children. Many programs with special funding are model demonstration projects with highly qualified personnel. However, the administrative mechanism for guaranteeing quality intervention, at least in a minimal sense, rests in state teacher certification. This survey indicates that little progress has been made since the last reported survey (Hirshoren & Umansky, 1977) in establishing state preschool handicapped teacher certification. (A comparison between these two surveys is admittedly difficult, however, because of procedural differences in identifying this category of certification. In the present study, only those states who identified early childhood handicapped certification as distinct from early childhood/kindergarten certification were counted).

These results, coupled with recent political activities, verify the need for accelerated advocacy on the part of professionals, parents and policy makers in the area of early intervention for handicapped children. Although it appears that some states have moved to legislate early educational services to preschool handicapped children, the total number is at best discouraging when one considers the decade and a half of research, federal support, and advocacy that has existed in this area. Deregulation of P.L. 94-142, coupled with federal cutbacks in monetary support is a reality the field is currently faced with (for an analysis of this, the reader is referred to the Association for Severely Handicapped Newsletter dated August, 1981).

Without the federal support in terms of regulations and monies, the impetus for services must come from the local level within each of the states. Advocates must push for educational services to <u>all</u> preschool handicapped children with <u>qualified</u> personnel, regulated through teacher certification requirements.

Implications for the future

Several strategies should be employed in order to affect state policy decisions. First, active parent organizations need to be developed and nurtured. At the preschool level, identifying parent advocates is difficult since many are not currently involved in the educational network. Because of this, professionals and other advocates must inform parents of the effectiveness of early education and the need to advocate for state legislation to insure an early education to all handicapped children. Many locales do not have an intact parent group to work with. Initially, then, professional educators must assume the leadership role.

Secondly, the general public must be informed that preschool handicapped education is not a "babysitting" service. Many curious parents innocently ask "...but what can a three-year-old learn?" Unless the general public understands the functions of early education for handicapped children and is shown the results--both in terms of developmental progress and cost-effectiveness--they will not support state legislation appropriating needed funds.

Thirdly, educational personnel must begin interacting with other child-care professionals, who represent a variety of agencies (Head Start, Social Services, Associations for Young Children, etc.). Through professional interaction, integrated service models will become a reality, and child-care providers will become advocates for the handicapped. This group of professionals is desperately needed to enlarge the advocacy base. Interaction strategies would include: (a) visiting local day care centers; (b) volunteering to attend local meetings and presenting information related to the education of the young handicapped child; (c) conducting in-service workshops; and (d) forming local alliances to advocate together for the education of young handicapped

children. Integrating the handicapped into existing local programs will help to insure their position in the educational system.

Fourthly, advocates must begin immediately to organize a legislative task force to present empirical evidence, awareness films and brochures, as well as parent feelings and needs to state legislators prior to state legislative action which will affect the provision of services to this population.

Preschool handicapped education is at a crossroads. For many states, the immediate threat is to maintain and hold on to the progress already made during the last decade. Other states are fighting desperately to gain a foothold in the state educational framework by attempting to pass state legislation mandating preschool handicapped services. We must either firmly establish our concerns as a viable, secure state and local educational component, or watch state and federal legislation erode a decade-and-a-half of progress.

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Table 1

State by State Response to Survey Questions[a]

STATE	Legislative Mandate 0-3	Legislative Mandate 3-5	Services Available 0-3	Services Available 3-5	PSH Teacher Certification Required	PSH Teacher Certification In Process	Teacher Train. Programs Leading to PSH Certification
Alabama			X	X	X		5
Alaska	X	X	X	X			
Arizona			X	X			
Arkansas							
California		X	X	X		X	
Colorado			X	X	X		2
Connecticut		X	X	X		X	
Delaware	d/b only	X	X	X	X		1
Dist. of Columbia		X		X	X		0
Florida		5 y/o	X	X			
Georgia		5 y/o	X	X			
Hawaii		X		X			
Idaho			X	X			
Illinois	(some)	X	X	X	X		6
Indiana			X	X			
Iowa	X	X	X	X	X		5
Kansas			X	X		X	
Kentucky			X	X			
Louisiana	X	X	X	X	X		5
Maine			*	X		X	
Maryland	X	X	X	X	X	X	Yes
Massachusetts	*	X	*	X			4
Michigan	X	X	X	X		X	
Minnesota		4-5 y/o	X	X		X	
Mississippi			X	X			
Missouri		5 y/o	X	X	X		15
Montana			X	X			
Nebraska	X	X	X	X	X		2
Nevada			X	X		X	
New Hampshire		X	X	X			
New Jersey				*		X	
New Mexico			X	X		X	
New York				X			
North Carolina			X	X		X	
North Dakota			X	X	X		1
Ohio				X		X	
Oklahoma	-50%/nor	4-5 y/o	X	X			
Oregon			X	X			
Pennsylvania				Kinder.			
Rhode Island		X	X	X	X		3
South Carolina		4-5 y/o	X	X			
South Dakota	X	X	X	X			
Tennessee		X	X	X			
Texas	d/b only	X	X	X	X		6
Utah			X	X			
Vermont			X	X	X		
Virginia		*	2-4 y/o		X		5
Washington			X	X			
West Virginia		5 y/o	X	X		X	
Wisconsin		X	X	X	X		7
Wyoming	X	X	X	X	X		1

[a]X=Yes Response
Blank=No Response
y/o=year old
d/b=deaf/blind
*indicates that respondent left the information blank —.

Table 2

Percentage of States Serving Subgroups of

Preschool Handicapped Population

Response Category	% of Respondents[a]
States mandating all 0-5 PSH be served	16% (N=8)
States mandating services to a subset of the 0-3 group	8% (N=4)
States mandating services to all PSH in the 3-5 group	24% (N=12)
States mandating services to a subset of the 3-5 group	14% (N=7)

[a]Total respondents equal 50 states, plus the District of Columbia unless otherwise indicated.

Table 3

Percentage of States Where Preschool Handicapped Services are Available

Response Category	% of All Respondents
PSH services available to some 0-3 group	83% (N=42)
PSH services available to some 3-5 group	96% (N=49)

Table 4

Preschool Handicapped Service Setting Type

Utilized Most Often

Type of Service Setting	% of Respondents[a] Ranking Type as Most Often Used
Center-based model	68% (N=19)
Home-based model	21% (N=6)
Combination home-and-center based model	10% (N=3)
Models used equally as often	6% (N=2)

[a]Fifty-nine percent of all respondents reported this information (N=30)

Table 5

State Preschool Handicapped Teacher

Certification Status

Response Category	% of All Respondents[a]
PSH Teacher Certification Established	35% (48%)
PSH Teacher Certification in Process	24% (42%)
No PSH Teacher Certification	41% (43%)

[a]Percentages in parentheses indicate the percentage of states from each category that also mandate PSH services.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Sample of reinforcement contingencies for respondents.

FIGURE 1

If you return your completed questionnaire by January 30, 1981, you will receive:

A 5 x 7 xeroxed CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION that is suitable for framing.

If you return your completed questionnaire by February 5, 1981, you will receive:

A form letter on plain bond paper that says THANKS.

If you return your completed questionnaire after February 20, 1981 and before April 1, 1981, you will receive:

The INTRINSIC SATISFACTION of knowing that you have contributed to my national survey.